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Architecture's 'Cartographic Turn'

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Over the past thirty years something of a 'cartographic turn' has taken place in key areas of architectural theory and practice.¹ What I mean by this is that there has been an increasing use of mapping as a generative – that is as a formal, formative, and not simply analytical – process within architectural projects. While this has been commented upon,² there has been little attempt to analyse the historical or ideological basis of this phenomenon. It is evident – and this is one of the main points of interest – that cartographic strategies have been used to orientate the architectural project in contrasting ways: as well as supplying procedures supporting avowedly 'post-humanist', 'weak', or 'abject' architectures, such approaches are also deeply implicated in the closest thing we have to a contemporary 'visionary' architecture, one whose discourse is saturated with references to spirit, faith and hope. Both call upon the resources of the map in the context of a rhetoric of ends: of man, humanism, architecture and its possibilities. But equally, an important aspect of the 'cartographic turn' is the emergence, more recently, of a new 'productivist' ethos informed, in particular, by the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The emphasis here falls upon what the architectural strategy/representation *does* rather than what it *means*:³ what is valued is the maximisation of effects rather than any single determination.⁴ This valorisation is cognate with a politico-aesthetics of mobility deployed in the face of processes of 'subjectification' (the carcereal spectre that haunts the thought not only of Deleuze and Guattari, but also of Foucault and Derrida)⁵ and it is one of the peculiarities of the situation that the map, historically so

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- ¹ The term has also been used by Bruno Bosteels to characterise developments in recent critical theory. He writes: «From the textual analysis of writing as much as from an ethical dimension of acting... the emphasis is shifting to the cultural study of literary, artistic, and ideological forms of mapping»: Bruno Bosteels, «From Text to Territory: Félix Guattari's Cartographies of the Unconscious» in Eleanor Kaufman and Kevin Jon Heller (eds), *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London (1998): 145-174; 146.
 - ² See, for example, James Corner's interesting essay «The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention» in D. Cosgrove (ed), *Mappings*, Reaktion Books, London (1999): 213-252.
 - ³ «In contrast, practices imply a shift to performance, paying attention to consequences and effects. Not what a building, a text or a drawing means, but what it can do: how it operates in –and on– the world»: Stan Allen, «Introduction: Practice vs. Project» in *Practice: Architecture, Technique and Representation*, G+B Arts International, Amsterdam (2000):xxv.
 - ⁴ So, James Corner writes how cartographic strategies can act to «emancipate potentials, enrich experiences and diversify worlds»; mapping can be «a productive and liberating instrument, a world-enriching agent,» it «unfolds potential ... re-makes territory over and over again, each time with new and diverse consequences»: Corner (1999): 213. Or, arguing for an approach to architecture conceived as practice (as opposed to 'project') Stan Allen writes: «The practitioner looks for performative multiplicities in the interplay between an open catalogue of procedures and a stubbornly indifferent reality»: Allen (2000): xviii.
 - ⁵ Thus Foucault's famous conclusion to the introduction of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: «I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order»: Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Routledge, London and New York (1991): 17. So too Derrida's comment

complicit with those very processes, is drawn upon in the refusal of them. Or rather it is, more frequently, the diagram: but map and diagram are closely related for Deleuze and Guattari and not easily separated and, as this paper will show, the characteristics which lead to the new productivist valorisation of the diagram are already present in the two tendencies mentioned above.

In the semiology of C S Peirce, whose categories Deleuze and Guattari accept but reformulate, the diagram appears as a sub-group of the *icon*, a sign characterised by relations of similitude between the signifying material and the referent. Peirce outlines three sub-groups of the icon: the image (similitude through «simple qualities»); the diagram (similitude through analogous internal relations); and the metaphor (similitude through a parallel representative characteristic).⁶ In his terms, insofar as it is an icon, the map would be both image and diagram, although it would tend toward only the latter when the rules which establish its graphic relations alienate it from the «simple qualities», as Peirce puts it, that bind it to its referent. So, for example, a map of a country scaled according to train journey times between its cities retreats from the image, and while in Peirce's terms technically it may have no greater a claim to diagrammatism than does a conventional ichnographic plan of the territory, *our sense of it* as a diagram is heightened through the diminution of the apparent immediacy of its relation to the referent.

This point has some relevance to the current architectural discourse on the diagram which, importantly, seems to offer a strategic detachment from the referent and hence considerable interpretive and experimental mobility in the way that the image does not. In turn, this perception has underpinned an opposition that has increasingly been made between the diagram and the drawing.⁷ Although in Peircean terms, the conventional architectural projections of plan, section, and elevation actually are diagrams, based as they are upon measured, proportional relations (and not «simple qualities» disclosed to the eye), the opposition demands to be understood in the context of Deleuze and Guattari's redescription of Peirce's schema whereupon the diagram / drawing opposition maps onto their deterritorialisation / reterritorialisation distinction. Thus one question to be put to the various 'diagrammatic' practices in architecture today is to what extent is the diagrammatic detachment from the image (the 'drawing') achieved? Or do we, with the so-called instrumentalisation of the diagram in architectural production, conversely have a practice that, as it departs from the image, formalises the diagram and so turns out never to have left?⁸

In this paper I aim to do two things: firstly, to engage directly with the themes of this book by setting out a series of interconnected propositions regarding architecture and its

"...you wonder how I would describe what is called 'woman's place' ... Why must there be a place for a woman? And why only one, a single, completely essential place? The joyous disturbance of certain women's movements, and of some women in particular, has actually brought with it the chance of a certain risky turbulence in the assigning of places within our small European space ... Is one then going to start all over again making maps, topographics, etc?, distributing sexual identity cards": Jacques Derrida, «Choreographies» in *Between the Blinds: a Derrida Reader*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead (1991): 440-456; 442-443.

⁶ *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol.II: Elements of Logic, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, Belknap Press, Cambridge Mass. (1965): 157.

⁷ R E Somol, «Dummy Text: or the Diagrammatic Basis of Contemporary Architecture» in Peter Eisenman, *Diagram Diaries*, Thames and Hudson, London (1999): 6-25; 7-8.

⁸ Somol's description of Eisenman's use of the fold, for example, which he describes as «a map of the event ... a diagram of the virtual» casts it in the role of an *aufhebung* which negates and recuperates the formal characteristics of the two phases of his earlier work according to what amounts to the following formula: early house projects = section but no figure; intermediate archaeological projects = no section but figure; late fold projects = complex section and figure: R E Somol (1999): 21.

representational forms; and secondly, by expanding the last of these, to suggest what the start of a genealogy for architecture's 'cartographic turn' might look like, and what is at stake in it.

Proposition 1

Architectural representations are not, in any straightforward way, transcriptions of prior mental images. The idea recalls Marx's aphorism that the difference between the worst of architects and the best of bees is that the former makes a building in his mind first. However, the architectural image - particularly in the speculative, design stages of a project - is less projected onto the surface of representation than *constructed upon* it through the interplay of a wide range of technical, material, somatic and mental informants. Thus it is problematic to speak of representation here at all, at least insofar as it pertains to the relationship between a mental and a material image. I am of course not arguing that nothing passes from head to paper when we draw, but that the transactions are multiple and complex.

Proposition 2

The cognitive status and developmental possibilities of the architectural object are radically affected by the representational regime within which it is instantiated.⁹ In a design process in which the architectural object is sequentially submitted to differing representational regimes, its 'identity' is continually placed in hazard to the extent that we are, in a sense, continually presented with different proposals. No matter how stable and familiar the codes or to what extent they appear to corroborate one another (for example, plan, section, and elevation) in describing a stable reality, the conceptual horizon they implicate, the possibilities they project, what is imminent within them, differs. The project is continually, through its representational forms, taking flight in differing ways. Its alternate states hold out different promises to the designer whose implications may as easily be programmatic as formal.

Proposition 3

The regimes of representation deployed continually produce alienation-effects as they instantiate the architectural object. Even if we are a master of a technique or we employ the most conventional, technical, and stable representational mode, the result is always to some extent surprising and unanticipated. It is always 'other' and is open to being read in ways we did not imagine. If we are interested in sites of productive architectural conjecture and experimentation, we should direct our attention not to the identity of the architectural object as it passes through varying representational modes, but rather to those moments in which that identity lapses, where the materiality of the signifier asserts itself, and where codes of representation and reading become unhinged. These are the moments where representation thought as identity fails, where the opacity of the signifier is felt, where it 'thickens' and diverts us. This is not of the order of a mistake; it is an inevitable condition of representation.

⁹ As Robin Evans writes: «Architectural drawing affects what might be called the architect's field of visibility. It makes it possible to see some things more clearly by suppressing other things We have to understand architectural drawing as something that defines the things it transmits. It is not a neutral vehicle transporting conceptions into objects, but a medium that carries and distributes information in a particular mode»; «The Developed Surface: An Enquiry into the Brief Life of an Eighteenth-Century Drawing Technique» in *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays*, Architectural Association, London (1997): 194-231; 199.

Proposition 4

When the architectural project is exploratory and experimental - its end-condition necessarily uncertain and provisional - the mode of persuasion and explanation of the work in institutional situations switches to a narrative form, or better, a series of narrative 'attempts'. All discursive persuasion that seeks to explain or legitimise a work, over and above the eloquence of the object itself, bears witness to a certain crisis of shared values while, at the same time, appealing at the same time precisely to shared values, albeit at another level. If the high modernist mode of persuasion operated by projecting a vision *in total* of a renewed society to which the architectural object bore anticipatory witness, the kind of work I'm thinking of tends to replace this with a more 'minor' account of the procedural and narrative negotiations involved in the generation of the work itself. How does this then act, in an institutional setting, as persuasion? Through the ability of the narrative to build a 'thick' culture around the work, a culture which might appear, in the first instance, to be not-at-all 'architectural'. In these projects, persuasion occurs through a kind of increased density of meaning, in which what becomes important is not so much the value *per se* of the early procedural gestures as the way they ramify and proliferate. Pleasure is taken less in the lucidity of a work than in its thick inter-textuality. A good example of persuasion working this way is contained in Daniel Libeskind's account of his meeting with Berlin planning officials over his Jewish museum project, and his presentation using lined musical manuscript paper, introduced as part of the conceptual 'culture' of the project. The opening that this created for his project was a kind of interruption of the official, institutional, discourses.¹⁰

Proposition 5

Mapping as an architectural strategy has its roots in the varied responses to the crisis of meaning that erupted within architectural discourse in the later 1960s. This was precipitated by the influence of developments (such as French Structuralism and the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School) in related fields. Historically the 'cartographic turn' seems to take two forms, one of which precedes the other but interacts with it. On one hand we have approaches that develop the architectural object through a logically endless series of permutational moves so that the assemblage comes to be the composited sequence of transformational states; on the other we have an architecture whose formal impulse derives from something that is in some sense already there: part of the site, its history, representations, social practices, or modes of appropriation. Rather than defining form the architect proceeds by identifying strata or constellations of pre-existents and the formal character of the work accrues as an effect of the processes and codes through which they are mapped and brought into relationship with one another. In both cases the presumption is that form is generated by the application of processes rather than being produced out of the deep interiority of the subject. As will be seen, this does not presuppose a non- or anti-auratic

¹⁰ «...I went to the meeting, and I had the brief in front of me written on the yellow musical notation paper. There were about thirty administrators and politicians sitting around the table... After about forty minutes of discussion ... the meeting was over. Everybody left, and I didn't actually understand what had happened, because we hadn't discussed the issue. We had not discussed the line of the street ... We had only discussed the music notation paper. Anyway, it was incredible, because some time later I received from the Planning Administration of the Senate of Berlin an approval for breaking the street line. I have always believed that these events were truly not arbitrary; they were not disconnected. The musical line penetrates even the most prosaic meetings of the Berlin Senate and there it explodes and reformulates itself and becomes kind of a network of a web that cannot even be conceived of in any simple storyline»: «Chamberworks: Architectural Meditations on the Themes from Heraclitus: Lecture, Berlin, 1997» in Daniel Libeskind, *The Space of Encounter*, Universe Publishing, New York (2000):50-54;54.

outcome. A result is that technique is foregrounded and a descriptive vocabulary of procedures arises: layering, grafting, scaling, excavating, etc.

Both approaches are oppositional strategies insofar as they share a suspicion of 'everyday' reality or consciousness and thus are proximate to modernist projects that aimed at the critical transformation of objects to consciousness.¹¹ This is well illustrated in the cartographic projects which, by mapping hidden and 'other' conditions – suppressed and alternative histories, mythic events, 'minor' phenomena – denaturalise the urban map by unhinging it from its conventional concerns, its economic, legal, military and administrative values, while trading upon the basic codes which ensure cartographic legibility. The success of cartographic procedures within architecture derives, at least in part, from the strategic immediacy of their contact with conventional projective architectural representation: this allows direct transfer of the full disruptive force of these alternative cartographies while bypassing the need for any accommodating transformation. Thus a project like Libeskind's entry for the Potsdamer Platz competition, which "traces the contortions of [a] nonexistent Angel" becomes, in a sense, literally a map inscribed upon the city.¹² **(FIGURE 1)**

To unpack some of the complexities of architecture's 'cartographic turn' it is helpful to consider two architects whose discourses illustrate the contradictory tendencies outlined at the start of this paper: Daniel Libeskind and Peter Eisenman. Both architects have used the map, not so much to implant architecture within its site as to unground it, to detach it from its accommodation to the dominant discourses within which the identity of the site is construed. Of his work Libeskind has written: «What I tried to do with the problem of architecture... was to disengage it from its position on earth ... to send it to its stellar source.»¹³ My argument will stress the extent to which at the stellar source we find the earth again, repeated, but with a difference.

Libeskind and Eisenman share a common point of departure in a 'critique of functionalism' – if, at least, we mean by functionalism an ideology which insists on the use-value of architecture as its principal determinant and thus always places it, as an instrument, in the service of other ends. Eisenman situates this critique within the broader problem of humanism: in its radical anthropocentrism functionalism appears as the logical consequence of humanism. His work then develops as a pursuit of the consequences of the exile of the 'subject of humanism' from architecture.

If Eisenman's work would call for a certain debasement of architecture, Libeskind's critique of functionalism, aligned with the German phenomenological tradition – Husserl, Heidegger, and the strands of their thought that fed into the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School - attacked architecture because it was already debased, brought low by rationalisation and instrumentalisation, entrapped by a bureaucratic and administered world. Furthermore, the historical trajectory of scientific rationality led, he argued, to a contemporary «victory of the invisible» achieved at the expense of a radically desublimated and indeed detheologized

¹¹ See Rosalind Krauss' comments on the relationship between Eisenman's early work and formalist theory in «Death of a Hermeneutic Phantom: Materialization of the Sign in the Work of Peter Eisenman» in Peter Eisenman, *Houses of Cards*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York (1987): 166-184: 166-179. But also Libeskind's statement «The poverty of the so-called 'real world' must be unmasked as a form of ruling ideology whose interests and ambitions do not necessarily coincide with our full existence and its aspirations»: Daniel Libeskind, «Symbol and Interpretation» in *Radix-Matrix: Architecture and Writings*, Prestel, Munich and New York (1997): 152-154;154.

¹² Daniel Libeskind, «Out of Line : Urban Competition, Potsdamer Platz, Berlin, 1991 » in *The Space of Encounter* (2000) : 142-144 ; 142.

¹³ Daniel Libeskind, «The Pilgrimage of Absolute Architecture (A Conversational Explanation)» in *Countersign* (1991): 42.

visual field, now shorn of any revelatory or prophetic potential.¹⁴ Recently Libeskind's work has been described as «crucially an architecture of memory»¹⁵; and certainly, after the Berlin projects, this is true; but this sits within a prior thematic, an insistence on *witnessing*, of bringing into visibility; and it is on the basis of this, as well as the more general and historical associations of the term (the appearance of the transcendental in emblematic form), that his practice might be described as 'visionary'. Introducing his project for Alexanderplatz in 1994, he spoke of «...the need to resist the erasure of history, the need to respond to history, the need to open the future. That is, to delineate the invisible on the basis of the visible.»¹⁶ When seen this way, the conceptualization of the Jewish Museum seems close to Walter Benjamin's reflections on the moral claim the dead have upon the present, on the need to recognise the dead and thus bring them, in their absence, to 'life'.¹⁷ The way this works its way out will be through an architecture that operates as a cartography.

Thus Eisenman and Libeskind's architectural trajectories both develop rhetorically out of 'ends': the end of humanism, of anthropocentrism, of architecture dignified by its foundation in the 'human', of technological, postivist utopias. How then to respond to these ends? For Eisenman it would be to inhabit their unhomely terrain and initiate a process that would ceaselessly demonstrate them. Thus, even while architecture would be collapsed, it at the same time had to be assiduously protected as a medium. In contrast, Libeskind's emphasis fell on the surpassing or overcoming of the 'ends' giving a Nietzschean tone to his writing. Responding to Eisenman's essay *The Futility of Objects*, he wrote that, at its end, «insofar as the architect ... discerns ... his true authority» humanism gives way to a humanism of a «higher sort» in which his relation to the process of making is returned to a more primordial condition.¹⁸ Yet at the same time, this met with apocalyptic and revelatory themes in Libeskind's discourse. So when the drawing is relieved from service and returns to itself, it displays a «prophetic» or «divinatory» power.¹⁹ By submitting to «mechanisms that provoke and support objective accomplishments» (the procedural conditions of drawing), the work develops in a non-teleological, structured, yet open way.²⁰ **(FIGURE 2)** The 'technique of drawing' overcomes 'drawing as technique'. In such an encounter one never in any absolute sense dominates or is the master of the work, rather it is experienced as the place of appearance of an oracular and emblematic 'other' which might even be, as Libeskind put it when speaking of a certain kind of city map, a «final apocalyptic image.» Later in the same

14 Daniel Libeskind, «Perspective – Emblem of Sacrifice» in *Daidalos*, 11 (1984): 106-119; 117.

15 Andreas Huyssen, «The Voids of Berlin» in *Critical Inquiry*, 24, Autumn (1997): 39.

16 Daniel Libeskind, «Traces of the Unborn» in Neil Leach (ed), *Architecture and Revolution: Contemporary Perspectives on Central and Eastern Europe*, Routledge, London and New York (1999):127-129;127.

17 Axel Honneth argues that Benjamin projected «a historiography that can disclose the past in such a way that the dead victims assume anew the form of animated beings. A 'Messianic power' falls to us today to the extent that we represent [*vergegenwärtigen*] the historical process in such a manner that its losers again appear as interacting partners in our present experiences and thereby become members of the moral community»: Axel Honneth, «A Communicative Disclosure of the Past: On the Relation Between Anthropology and Philosophy of History in Walter Benjamin» in Laura Marcus and Lynda Nead (eds), *The Actuality of Walter Benjamin*, Lawrence & Wishart, London (1998): 118-134; 129.

18 Daniel Libeskind, «Peter Eisenman and the Myth of Futility», *Harvard Architecture Review*, 3 (1984): 61-63 ; 62.

19 Libeskind, «Perspective – Emblem of Sacrifice» (1984): 107, 117.

20 Daniel Libeskind, «Micromegas: the Architecture of End Space» in *The Space of Encounter* (2000): 84-87; 84.

interview he went on: «The true prophetic qualities of drawings ... are the ones that cannot be controlled, not even by the people who drew them What cannot be controlled is real.»²¹

Its visionary character is something that places Libeskind's work in a very unique position in the field of contemporary architecture. It is certainly difficult to think of another architect of comparable prominence, in an era which has been characterised as one of the failure of the universal, who has found themselves able to so insistently invoke its vocabulary or to attack the implications of onto-theology while maintaining theological concepts centrally in their discourse. From this perspective, Libeskind's work looks less a break with modernism than the afterimage of the powerful (and historio-politically complicated) mystical and visionary traditions within it. Certainly these traditions were no strangers to a logic of exemplarity – whereby a group, privileged by exemplary status, ascends through that status to the universal – a logic which Derrida detected at work in Libeskind's thought and about which, during a discussion of the Jewish museum, he inquired.²²

The visionary character of Libeskind's work finds support in its insistently linear character: it draws upon the full descriptive, associative, and narrative possibilities of the line, and these in turn depend upon its suggestion of an active, unwinding temporality: the line is drawn, traced, pulled – it ramifies over time. Thus it can be life, fate, path, trajectory, incision, emblem, script, map. Its importance in the projects is its 'oscillation', its ability to structure a relationship between the finite and the infinite, the present and the future. In the line the material and the ideal seem to communicate: there is the poignant description of one within the other. Like those other oscillating emissaries, angels, to which Libeskind has increasingly referred, the line comes to bear some message as did the line in the sky («a sign from heaven») seen through the railway carriage door in the story told by a holocaust survivor and famously quoted by Libeskind as the epigraph to *Chamberworks*.²³ Thus too the conceit that one might through the agency of the line produce a cartography of the soul (as in Libeskind's description of the matrix of lines in his Alexanderplatz project as a «...histogram of invisible realities and their relations, a graph in time and space describing the equation of a city's soul»²⁴, or Hejduk's exclamation – «...we see the very soul...» – in his essay for *Chamberworks*).²⁵

How did Libeskind's work move from his early drawings (in which the line was supported by a page whose blankness was crucial) to a condition where the 'surface' of the drawing was the densely-weighted topography of the city (in particular, Berlin)? In two ways. On one hand the line became its own support. Instead of the fluctuating volumetric effects in *Micromegas* or the notational choreography of *Chamberworks*, the line acquired a vertiginously recursive quality as it was inscribed upon itself and proliferated at differing scales through the work. This complication of the line was very much played out upon the surface: often the multiplying lines, whether text or graphic, were wrapped over the three

²¹ Donald L Bates, «A Conversation Between the Lines with Daniel Libeskind» in *El Croquis*, 80: *Daniel Libeskind 1987-1996* (1996): 6-29; 19, 28.

²² Jacques Derrida "Response to Daniel Libeskind" in Daniel Libeskind, *Radix-Matrix: Architecture and Writings* (1997): 110-115 ; 111. The same logic seems in evidence in Libeskind's 1984 essay *Perspective: Emblem of Sacrifice* when he comments that the cardinal phenomenon of (European) 20th century architecture was its «trans-historical» (and apparently trans-cultural) meaning : Libeskind, «Perspective – Emblem of Sacrifice» (1984): 118-119.

²³ Daniel Libeskind, «Chamberworks: Architectural Meditations on Themes from Heraclitus» in *Countersign* (1991): 110.

²⁴ Libeskind, «Traces of the Unborn» in Neil Leach (ed), *Architecture and Revolution: Contemporary Perspectives on Central and Eastern Europe* (1999):129.

²⁵ John Hejduk, «The Albatross Screeched» in Daniel Libeskind, *Countersign* (1991): 122.

dimensional surface of the supporting line (**FIGURE 3**); depth in the architecture was most frequently found through the projection of a graphic (a line, for example, as void projected into a solid). And on the other hand, the projects embraced the texture of the city - its geographies, histories, and artefacts. When Robin Evans reviewed the *Chamberworks* drawings he stressed their «...near total disengagement from signification of any kind.»²⁶ If we accept this, the immediacy of Libeskind's engagement with the city seems curious. But even in the early drawings the line was, at least conceptually, being brought into contact with very specific material conditions – hence the allusion to the vapour-trail in the sky, or his comment in *End Space* which links the *Micromegas* drawings to Husserl's reflections on geometry and to its origins in land-surveying, in the measurement of the earth.²⁷

Both speculative and empirically grounded cartographies are in operation in many of Libeskind's projects, but perhaps most eloquently so in his Jewish museum where he conceptually resituated the project's ground by plotting a matrix of lines that connected addresses of emblematic German and Jewish inhabitants of Berlin and related them to the figure of a distended Star of David. In an interview with Anne Wagner, he argued the need for a kind of building he described as a 'icon' and likened to an angel, a witness that can only appear as a kind of rupture in the logic of the city.²⁸ From our point of view, the Jewish museum seems to figure Walter Benjamin's angel of history, who wanted to wake the dead, as a cartographer. The project emerges from a kind of contextualism, but one that, by way of a cartographic refounding of the context which the building instantiates, finds a radically different form of architecture than the kind we usually associate with that term.

* * *

In his editorial to the sixth issue of *Oppositions* (1976) Eisenman argued that «...functionalism is really no more than a late phase of humanism rather than an alternative to it.»²⁹ Referring both to Claude Lévi-Strauss and Michel Foucault, he continued: «...the symptoms ... suggest a displacement of man away from the centre of his world. He is no longer viewed as an originating agent.»³⁰ This displacement, which implicated both architect and user, inspiring strategies for the effacement of the former and the exile of the latter, established the keynote for the subsequent playing-out of Eisenman's discourse. In his writing the evidence was accumulated: from the structuralist dispersion of the subject; to the collapse of the technological utopia after Auschwitz and Hiroshima; to the destabilisation of reality by new media and information technologies.

In «Misreading», published eleven years later, Eisenman reiterated his earlier argument. Once again, modernist architecture was indicted of an underlying conservatism expressed in the centrality it accorded to function. This preserved, the argument ran, a deep-seated classical-humanist metaphysics.³¹ What is, however, striking about this text is that the imperative to establish a post-humanist architecture – one that would not assuage man's

²⁶ Robin Evans, "In Front of Lines that Leave Nothing Behind," *AA Files*, 6 (1984): 89-96 ; 90.

²⁷ Daniel Libeskind, «Micromegas: the Architecture of End Space» in *The Space of Encounter* (2000): 87.

²⁸ «Resisting the Erasure of History: Daniel Libeskind Interviewed by Anne Wagner» in Neil Leach (ed), *Architecture and Revolution: Contemporary Perspectives on Central and Eastern Europe* (1999): 130-138; 133.

²⁹ Peter Eisenman, «Post-Functionalism,» *Oppositions* 6, Fall (1976): 9-12: 10.

³⁰ Eisenman, «Post-Functionalism,» (1976): 11.

³¹ Peter Eisenman, «Misreading» in Peter Eisenman, *Houses of Cards*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York (1987): 167-186: 169-170.

unmediated confrontation with existential anxiety – is linked to a quasi-therapeutic principle of invention. Eisenman called this ‘dislocation’: and it is this, he argued, that inaugurates the new in the face of a frozen institutionalism and thereby unveils hitherto repressed possibilities for architectural form.³² As an example of this he cited his *House IV*. Supposedly ‘self-generating’ – arising from a process of sequential transformations – and hence distanced equally from author and recipient – it seemed to present a distinctly a-functional object.³³ So too did *House VI* where, as a result of its generative process, columns fell within the dining area appearing, from the point of view of the social institution of dining, an absurd disruption. «Nonetheless, these dislocations», wrote Eisenman, «these ‘inappropriate forms’ have, according to the occupants of the house, changed the dining experience in a real, and more importantly, unpredictable fashion. The design process ... intended to move the act of architecture from its complacent relationship with the metaphysic of architecture by reactivating its capacity to dislocate, thereby extending the search into the possibilities of occupiable form.»³⁴

With this, Eisenman’s project to evict the classical subject from architecture begins to meet with a productivism: it becomes an architecture grounded in invention.³⁵ With the insistence on the dispersion of the subject, the loss of anthropocentrism, and the imminence of annihilation one might have thought that architecture’s prospects were not good. But it seems that the opposite is the case and we are faced (theoretically at least) with a cornucopia as architectures, freed from any teleology (functional, aesthetic, etc.), proliferate. Rather than confronting a void, ‘man’, to follow the logic, looks onto a world of indifferent objects.³⁶

If the imperative to symbolise the loss of control of the subject over its meanings contravenes its aim by presupposing – in its symbolic agenda – the opposite case (that is, control over meaning), and maintains the idea of architecture as a representational art,³⁷ then by the «Misreading» essay, which is situated well within the period of what I’ll call the ‘cartographic’ projects, the symbolic locus of the work has become dispersed as a series of effects resulting from operational procedures. The symbolic mechanism works through a process of sequential alienation, the conclusion being that the expulsion of the subject from architecture is best realised through the productivity of the latter. This shift seems related to Eisenman’s move away from the concept of «autonomy» which he described as the goal of the early houses (waning after House VI).³⁸ The ‘turning inward’ of the early designs toward

³² Eisenman, «Misreading» (1987): 167-169.

³³ Eisenman, «Misreading» (1987): 177.

³⁴ Eisenman, «Misreading» (1987): 169.

³⁵ «...the essence of the act of architecture is the dislocation of an ever-reconstituting metaphysic of architecture» ; «The current work is looking for an architecture that is far more *real* than architecture ever is»: Eisenman, «Misreading» (1987): 167 and 186.

³⁶ Libeskind clearly recognises this in his essay on Eisenman: he writes «By divesting itself of humanism, architecture makes visible the *horror pleni*, not *vacui*, of reality. The sign of architecture in the present – its authentic post-modernity – is a trace of the nonhuman haunted by the image of its own inhumanity»: Libeskind, «Peter Eisenman and the Myth of Futility», (1984): 62. Given Eisenman’s stress on *occupiable* form, we might suspect the degree to which these objects are in fact indifferent.

³⁷ “Incapable of believing in reason, uncertain of the signification of his objects, man [has lost] his capacity for signifying There is now merely a landscape of objects; new and old are the same; they appear to have meaning but speak into the void of history. The realization of this void, at once cataclysmic and claustrophobic, demands that past present and future be reconfigured. To have meaning, both objects and life must acknowledge and symbolize this new reality”: Peter Eisenman, “Introduction” in Kenneth Frampton (ed), *Aldo Rossi in America: 1976-1979*, IAUS, New York (1979): 3

³⁸ Eisenman, «Misreading» (1987): 181-182.

some notional depth condition governed by the concept of autonomy led to a more monolithic symbolic condition (underwritten, metaphorically and metonymically, by the insistence on the 'House') than in the work that followed, whose 'horizontal', intertextual expansion was fuelled by a constantly developing set of operational procedures that Eisenman subsequently tabulated in *Diagram Diaries*.³⁹

Eisenman's early house projects seem proximate to a certain kind of cartographic approach insofar as they can be described as arising from a composited mapping of the serial states of the object.⁴⁰ Understood in this way, the originary rectilinear frame from which they developed played the part of a cartographic graticule whose role was to calibrate the transformations of the object. However, the 'cartographic projects' which Eisenman developed from 1978⁴¹ entailed a shift to a situation whereby the project came to be constituted within a field of texts (maps, plans, photographs, narratives, etc) whose selection established something like a shifting internal culture for each work.⁴² This move also inaugurated a series of operational terms (excavation, scaling, etc.) within which a new degree of value was invested and which overcoded the earlier, less voluble procedures (rotation, doubling, etc.) The new situation is illustrated well by the lengthy exposition on scaling at the beginning of his introduction to *Moving Arrows, Eros and Other Errors*, and in particular Eisenman's statement that: «Scaling yields a new mode of architectural intervention which has the potential to destabilize the heretofore intransigent and now untenable centrism of the metaphysics of architecture: first, the value that architecture gives to presence; and, second, the value that architecture gives to origin.»⁴³

While the earlier projects were established as volumetric from the beginning, the cartographic projects, hitched as they were to the representational form and codes of the map, were, as Yve-Alain Bois puts it, a «surface strategy»⁴⁴ (the exception to this being the occasions on which Eisenman drew upon historical photographs to produce a simulated object which 'stood upon' the surface, such as the tower of the Old Armory in the Wexner Center, or the oil derrick in the Long Beach project). If the serial transformations of the early houses were always referable to – and delimited by – a primary condition (the pure geometric form), the loss of origin in the cartographic projects brought to the fore the question of how to stage the interplay of the representations deployed. Here a procedure such as scaling – the much-vaunted symbolic and operational counterpart to a post-humanist, non-anthropocentric architecture – shows its convenience; for now not only could every representation solicited 'hit the target' of the site to which it was directed, but it could also recur in concatenations of scales within it. Through this process, representations which referenced extreme differences in

³⁹ Peter Eisenman, *Diagram Diaries*, Thames and Hudson, London (1999): 238-239.

⁴⁰ Although this is certainly not the only way they could be described. On their *cinematic* character see R E Somol (1999): 16-18.

⁴¹ *The Wexner Center for the Visual Arts, Moving Arrows, Eros and Other Errors*, and the projects collected in *Cities of Artificial Excavation: the Work of Peter Eisenman, 1978-1988*, ed. Jean-François Bédard, Canadian Centre for Architecture / Rizzoli, Montréal (1994).

⁴² The grid of Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital, Eisenman's House 11a, and the martyrdom of Giordano Bruno in the Cannaregio project; the sequence of six maps and historical photographic documentation in the Long Beach project, etc.

⁴³ Peter Eisenman, «Moving Arrows, Eros and Other Errors» (printed as part of John Whiteman's paper «Site Unscene») in *AA Files*, 12, (1986): 76-84; 77.

⁴⁴ Yve-Alain Bois, «Surfaces» in *Cities of Artificial Excavation: the Work of Peter Eisenman, 1978-1988* (1994): 38-45; 42.

scale were able to be engaged in ways that promoted dissonance upon the screen of interaction that was the site.

* * *

How, then, might one sum up the work that cartography – and, more specifically, cartographic representation – does in these projects? Most obviously, Eisenman drew upon the map as a procedural and symbolic instrument in his continuing pursuit of a post-humanist architecture. Firstly, the archive of selected cartographic material, which replaced the supposed immediacy of the geometric frame, allowed the claim to be maintained – however far from «self-generating» the projects were – that the author was unseated. The sequential manipulation of volumetric geometric form was replaced by a sequential manipulation of cartographic material over which (despite its admittedly highly compositional character) the architect exercised at most a loose strategic control. Furthermore, the switch to cartography from the geometrical frame enabled, in a way that had not been previously possible within the anti-subjective terms of the latter's representational code, the intrusion of mimetic, figurative elements inherited from the documents deployed (such as the fortifications of Verona in the *Moving Arrows* project, or the river in the Long Beach scheme (**FIGURE 4**)). These could, it seems, legitimately step through the hole left by the cancelled author-subject: «I am so wary», Eisenman commented, «of personal figuration that I have used cartography as a prosthetic device, to manufacture figuration.»⁴⁵

Secondly, the deployment of maps facilitated an assault upon the 'ground' insofar as ground is understood as a closed contextual condition or origin from which an architecture could be construed. And this entailed, in complete contrast to the pure figure of the early houses, an architecture that merged with the ground in order to rewrite it. The architecture then developed in three dimensions through the assignation of varying degrees of buoyancy to the various compartments within this thickened surface⁴⁶ which became projected onto – and excavated from – the topography of the site in a parody of archaeological procedure. Thus maps, paradigmatically contextual documents, were manipulated as imported texts precisely to disturb context, both formally (in that there was a remaking of the ground condition) and by re-narrativising it through the new (intentionally fictive) internal culture that each project established. The relatively arbitrary character of the assemblages produced (which allowed them to stand as a critique of origin) mark their difference from Libeskind's cartographic practice in the Jewish museum. The former are without the indexical traits of the latter; that is, the way that it 'points' to its originating pre-existents. In Eisenman's cartographic projects, the pre-existents are themselves already representational documents (as opposed to being unmediated conditions 'on the ground') which are then organised through his catalogue of operational procedures into productive but non-necessary relationships.

Thirdly, the manipulation of maps brought an unprecedented graphic complexity to Eisenman's work, dispersing the project through the interference-effects produced by the superposition of layers (**FIGURE 5**). Throughout the cartographic projects there was a compulsive movement toward increased complexity, yet this tendency remained strangely under-theorised in Eisenman's discourse during the period. Certainly one result that this pluralisation seemed likely to support was the displacement of the project beyond the reach of

⁴⁵ «Conversation with Peter Eisenman» in *Cities of Artificial Excavation: the Work of Peter Eisenman, 1978-1988* (1994): 118-129;123.

⁴⁶ An evidently uncomfortably subjective intervention: «Each of the artificial excavation projects...are two dimensional...I did not know how to activate the third dimension»: «Conversation with Peter Eisenman» in *Cities of Artificial Excavation: the Work of Peter Eisenman, 1978-1988* (1994): 118-129;120.

any totalising narrative, including its own operative fiction. Yet even in the apparent absence of a master narrative, the degree to which Eisenman's discourse continued to divert the productive effects of his architecture into what, in the end, was exactly a master narrative, is striking: once again, a productivism served the turn of Eisenman's project of negation, a project whose instrument – a *symbolic* architecture – consequently remained insisted upon. Thus, for example, the reiteration, in the preamble to the Long Beach project, of the symbolic imperative even while «the traditional role of architecture» to «represent and symbolize [its] sheltering function» was being called into question: «Instead of symbolizing its function, it could symbolize that it shelters nothing...».⁴⁷

It is tempting to characterise Eisenman's work at this point as being poised between a high modern (symbolic) practice of negation and an architectural productivism. But it would be more accurate to say that the latter tendency, which developed in his work through the cartographic projects, was forced into compliance with the former, even as its momentum led it constantly to outstrip it. It is as if the sign of the 'ruin' was mobilised to cancel the strange futurity its form, despite itself, projected (thus Eisenman's description of his Berlin project as a «suspended object, a frozen fragment of no past and no future...»)⁴⁸ This relationship was mirrored in the persistent didacticism of Eisenman's writing which tended to spell out the symbolic value of the elements and procedures he deployed while submitting their productivities – the multiple architectural conditions produced – to the projects' regime of signs, thus entrapping them within it.

This, then, is an outline account of the operation of map-based strategies in the work of two architects whose discourses seem, to me at least, to be key to understanding architecture's 'cartographic turn'. Clearly it is partial and can hardly do justice to the complexities involved, not the least of which are developments in the architects' practices in the wake of the period discussed. But certainly one of the reasons why the focus on Libeskind and Eisenman is useful – and in particular on the enunciative character of drawing in the work of the former and the alienation strategies in the work of the latter – is its ability to cast light on the often surprising prehistory of contemporary architecture's anti-symbolic, productivist orientations and investment in diagrammatism.

⁴⁷ Peter Eisenman, «The Museum Rediscovered» in *Cities of Artificial Excavation: the Work of Peter Eisenman, 1978-1988* (1994): 130-168: 131.

⁴⁸ Peter Eisenman, «The City of Artificial Excavation» in *Cities of Artificial Excavation: the Work of Peter Eisenman, 1978-1988* (1994): 73-80; 76.